

5.11. Continue to provide financial and technical support for tourism projects

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product development.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT

- » Broaden awareness of technical and financial programs supporting tourism in Montana, in particular: the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP grants); the Special Event Grant Program (SEGP); and the Tourism E-Marketing Technology Grant.
- » Ensure that grant programs support efforts that (i) are consistent with the Montana Brand and (ii) contribute to the industry strategy. Evaluate the effectiveness of grants.
- » Monitor the needs of the industry and the value of grant programs to identify necessary changes or additions.
- » Maintain an updated list of tourism-related technical and financial assistance programs provided by various public and private sources.

Indicators of Success

- » Grant awards have demonstrable benefits: increasing visitation and visitor expenditures, improving delivery of the brand, or strengthening Montana's tourism offering in valuable ways.
- » Grant programs are evaluated and found to contribute strongly to strategic goals.
- » Stakeholders have access to updated information about other tourism-related technical and financial assistance programs provided by various public and private sources.

Background & Rationale

MTOT currently offers three grant programs designed to provide financial support to the tourism sector. The Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP) provides grant funding for tourism-related facilities and for the preservation of Montana's cultural and historical assets. The Special Event Grant Program is designed to help promote "hallmark events" that diversify and enhance Montana's tourism product. The Tourism E-Marketing Technology Grant helps businesses improve their competitive e-marketing position. As with all lodging tax expenditures, the funds allocated to these grant programs must be evaluated for effectiveness. Success can be measured in increased visitor expenditures, substantive improvement in Montana's tourism product, business success, or creation or preservation of important tourism assets. Outcomes can be difficult to evaluate accurately. Using comparison groups can improve the validity of evaluations where external factors play a role. For example, to evaluate an SEGP grant in terms of increased visitation, in addition to looking at attendance versus previous years, it is useful to look at attendance numbers for comparable events to separate the effects of the grant from the effects of weather or changes in the economy.

Resources

A good reference work on evaluating economic development activities is Bartik and Bingham (Bartik & Bingham, 1995), available at http://research.upjohn.org/up_workingpapers/29/.